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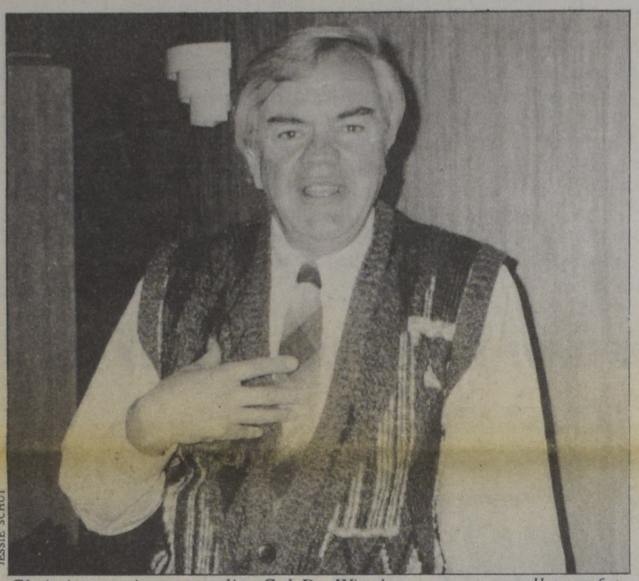
Town of Dunn a lesson in growth management

Jessie Schut.

EDMONTON Alta. — Cynics like to quote that old proverb, "You can't stop progress" to excuse why they're not doing anything to halt bad environmental practices. Christians often shrug their shoulders in helplessness. What can little people do in the face of giant corporations who have monopolies on the world?

But Cal De Witt has a story to tell to refute cynics and inspire dispirited Christians. The American Christian environmentalist was in town to give a talk at Earthkeeper's recent convention. De Witt teaches environmental science at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

De Witt's story is not a fable, but a real life tale of how a handful of ordinary citizens in the town of Dunn, Wisconsin, where he lives (population about 4,000) stood up to "progress" and are making a lasting difference.



JESSIE SCHUT

Christian environmentalist Cal De Witt has a story to tell to refute cynics and inspire dispirited Christians.

On fire for democracy

The story begins at a town hall meeting in 1972. About a dozen citizens had questioned their town board about decisions on land development. The 34.5 square miles of the town were located close to Madison, one of the state's largest cities.

The countryside was becoming urbanized as developers bought up the lands of retiring farmers and turned them into housing developments. These threatened the streams, wetlands, lakes and agricultural livelihood of the area.

De Witt was at that meeting, and heard a board member say, "If you don't like what we're doing, elect someone else next time, but for now you might as well go home." That statement converted him from being an objective observer to an emotional participant.

He delivered a speech on democracy that caught the attention of the questioners. They invited him to an organizational meeting to "throw out the board."

In April 1973, De Witt became one of two supervisors elected to the three-member town board, and two years after that he became the Town Chair. Under his leadership, and with the support and input of town citizens, the Town of Dunn has become a model for other towns across North America as an example of exemplary growth management. In 1995, the town won the Renew America Award for its success.

It has put into place a land use plan, a subdivision ordinance and agricultural conservancy zoning that provides an orderly stewardship plan for Dunn's lands.

Decision to care

Many steps were necessary in this process, beginning in 1975 with a thorough assessment and knowledge of the land the citizens lived on. A detailed inventory recorded such things as the geology and soils of the area; woods, prairies and wetlands; archaeological and historical sites; wildlife habitats; and how the hydrologic cycle worked.

"We discovered the rich heritage of our natural and social history," says De Witt. "We came to know our place. We liked what we found and we decided to care for it and keep it. We built a base for a land ethic by knowing where we were and what we held in trust."

A two-year moratorium on development gave the citizens time to chart these features and reflect and think about where the town was heading, while planning a course for the future.

See **WISCONSIN** *page 2...*

Christian Reformed churches try to foster ethnic, multiethnic outreach

Alan Doerksen

TORONTO — Christian Reformed Churches in the U.S. and Canada are taking a variety of approaches to domestic ethnic outreach. Some congregations, especially in the U.S., focus on reaching one group while others, particularly in Canada, prefer a multiethnic approach.

In Canada, especially in Vancouver and Toronto, the Christian Reformed Church has several Chinese congregations and other Asian churches.

But there are also two Cambodian congregations in St. Thomas and London, Ont., says John Van Til, regional director of home missions for Central and Eastern Canada. These two groups are being developed by two English-language congregations, First CRC in St. Thomas and Good News CRC in London.

Prefers mixing

Robert Haven is pastor of Good News CRC and acts as a mentor to Ath Sem, a Cambodian who is planting both Cambodian congregations.

The Cambodian ministry is a "cell-based church," Haven explains. There is currently one Cambodian cell group with about 20 people at the London church, and there are plans to subdivide it in the future. All meetings are in Khmer, the Cambodian language.

In London there are about 2,000 Cambodian immigrants, whom Haven sees as a mission field for the Cambodian ministry. The Cambodian ministry got a start-up grant from Home Missions.

Haven would like to see his church become more multicultural. "We look forward to a future where Cambodians and Anglos are mixed in a group," he says. "My dream is that Cambodian people will teach my children."

Some Christian Reformed congregations are deliberately working at becoming multicultural, Van Til observes. First CRC in Vancouver, for instance, now has one English and one Chinese pastor on staff. That church is focused on reaching second- and third-generation Chinese Canadians.

In Toronto, two CRCs have adopted a multicultural approach: All Nations Church and Friendship Community Church. Both have English services. Van Til says "the one experiencing the most consistent growth is Friendship Church."

Frederick Witteveen is the pastor and church-planter at Friendship. Since his church is based in the Jayne-Finch neighborhood of Toronto, which is very ethnically diverse, he

See **U.S.** *page 2...*

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News

Wisconsin town nurtures stewardship ethic

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A committed and energetic town board led meetings and met citizens face to face, generating enthusiasm and commitment from the constituency as they evaluated their present resources.

Naturally, there was also opposition to the change in direction. In the first few months, a whole series of lawsuits were filed against the town. The town persevered, however, by not building roads for a year and using the $100,000 saved as a fund to handle legal challenges.

Land ethic

In 1979, the town presented its findings in the "Town of Dunn Open Space Preservation Handbook," which provided a knowledge base for ethical political action. The handbook was followed with the land-use plan and the ordinances and laws that would preserve some land from being subdivided while providing for development in accord with the plan's purposes.

After the citizens approved plans and ordinances by referenda, the hard work of putting ideas into practice began. The town enforced the laws consistently and uniformly, and nurtured the stewardship ethic in its citizens by educational and festive events, and publishing a newspaper. All of it, warns De Witt, takes perseverance and a total life commitment to caring for creation.

"In Dunn, we have come to know that the integrity of the landscape and the community are worth all of our lives," he says. "A land ethic has been instilled, and we have dedicated our lives to it and its defence."

De Witt says the results of these ethics are published, not only in written form, but more so in the lives of its citizens and the landscape of the town — a publication that passers-by and casual observers can clearly read through observance.

People have built parks, restored prairies and wetlands, produced bicycle and canoe guides, cleaned up roadsides and streams and raised funds for stewardship projects.

Individual responsibility

Recently, says De Witt, when a local farm was put up for sale, the town bought the farm for a million dollars, used some of the land for parks, trails and reserves, put legal caveats on it to restrict its use for future commercial development, and resold it for $850,000. That relatively small investment ensures that the land will remain fruitful and the lifestyle of Dunn's citizens will be enhanced.

People have also become guardians of the Dunn stewardship ethic, taking responsibility for its continuation. They report problems to town hall when they see them, and pick up bags of garbage dumped at the roadsides, for instance, sifting through the rubbish to find addressed envelopes which identify to whom they will return the unwelcome junk.

"Laws are not enough," says De Witt. "The laws and ordinances have to be enforced ... and it's impossible to hire enough people to do that. And that's not the solution in the long run, anyway. Citizens must take responsibility to know the laws and do what they can in their own places and travels across the town to make sure [the laws] are being obeyed."

De Witt's story is a story of hope. "People in Dunn are not isolated from creation, they're an integral part of it," he says. "I think in our town you'd find fewer people sitting inside watching TV, living in a fantasy world. There are so many things to do — they're out on the biking and hiking trails, canoeing, walking and enjoying community activities."

"Taking a break from busyness can provide opportunity to develop the good sense of so living on the land that we do not destroy it and its life. If we can reclaim a respite from the frantic pace we set for ourselves and others, we will gain the time for asking the vital questions about who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going."

U.S. has more ethnic Christian Reformed churches

... continued from page 1

wanted the church to reflect that. "We didn't do the typical 'hiving off' from another church," says Witteveen. If the church had started with a Dutch-immigrant core, it would have had a hard time reaching other ethnic groups, he asserts.

Instead, the church has no majority ethnic group, but has members who are black, white, Hispanic and Asian. "Churches that are truly multiracial are rare," observes Witteveen. When starting the church, he decided services should be in English rather than another language because "once you become language-based, you're restricted to that group."

COURTESY FREDERICK WITTEVEEN

A summer get-together of Toronto's Friendship Community Church.

Mixed marriages

The church's congregation is mostly under age 30, and most members live within walking distance. The worship tends to be contemporary and youth-oriented, with a worship band featuring drums, bongos and electric guitar. But Witteveen adds, "A lot of people from the West Indies love hymns. They've been deeply influenced by the missionaries."

The church's leaders reflect its diverse ethnicity. The music director is from Spain; a Filipino is developing small groups, and a Kenyan immigrant leads the ushering work. "We have a lot of mixed marriages," adds Witteveen.

Comparing ethnic and multicultural churches, Van Til approves both approaches to church growth. "It all depends on what your objective is." If a church wants to do basic evangelism, such as introducing an ethnic group to Jesus, "their own language is most effective for doing that," he says.

Keep separate identities

The American branch of the Christian Reformed church has more ethnically based churches than the Canadian branch. Van Til says this is partly because the American church is larger and has a longer history than the CRC in Canada. Some American churches were started 140 years ago but "almost all Canadian CRCs are post-World War II."

American CRCs have tended to keep culture-based groups separate, but Canadian churches have integrated immigrants more into heterogeneous congregations, says Van Til.

Robert Price, an ethnic ministry director for CRC Home Missions in the U.S., says that Korean and Spanish-speaking congregations are the most common ethnic Christian Reformed congregations in the U.S.

The Korean churches now have their own classis in California, near Los Angeles, because of the high number of churches there. "Their heaviest concentration would be on the west coast because of ports of entry," explains Price.

Other Korean churches are in major cities such as Atlanta and Chicago.

Most members of Korean CRCs would be recent immigrants, says Price. "The children are not as committed to the native language."

Korean immigrants are attracted to the CRC because they were evangelized by Presbyterians and they see a similarity in the CRC, says Price. Another attraction is Koreans' interest in a regimented church order and strong work ethics.

Although Christian Reformed World Missions does no work at this point in Korea, Van Til observes that many Korean graduate students come to Calvin Seminary to study, which helps form a bond with the North American CRC.

In contrast to Koreans, members of Spanish-language CRCs "generally come out of a Catholic tradition," says Price. These churches are concentrated in Florida, Texas and California because of the large Hispanic populations there — though there are some in other states also. CRWM continues to do much mission work in Latin American countries, which could be having an effect on the growth of these churches.

Freer spirits

Since the 1950s, CRC Home Missions has made a deliberate effort to evangelize African Americans, says Price. He works closely with African American churches, which tend to have a mix of ethnic groups. Services are in English, but the preaching and worship style tends to be different from white congregations. White churches tend to favor didactic sermons, but black and Spanish churches focus more on story-telling.

In the U.S., homogeneous congregations tend to experience more church growth than multiethnic ones, says Price.

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News

Denominations take similar approaches to ethnic outreach

Alan Doerksen

TORONTO — Many denominations are focussing outreach on specific ethnic groups in Canada. Which groups these are usually depends on each denomination's historical or ethnic roots or its mission work.

As with the Christian Reformed Church, other denominations tend to develop either congregations of one ethnic group or focus on multiethnicity.

Reaching different ethnic groups is a priority for the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, says BCOQ executive minister Ken Bellous.

BCOQ has churches that worship in Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Assyrian and Hungarian — in places like Toronto, Montreal, Kitchener and Cambridge, Ont.

"Our fastest-growing ethnic group [is] Chinese. The Spanish churches would be close behind," says Bellous. The Chinese churches "have greater evangelistic zeal than our English congregations," he observes.

Personal contact

Canadian Baptists do much of their mission work in South America, especially Bolivia, Brazil and Venezuela. Dave Rogelstab, communications director for Canadian Baptist Ministries, says there is "an emerging connection" between Baptist mission work and its ethnic churches in Canada.

The Chinese connection is in Hong Kong, where Baptists still do overt mission work, despite China's takeover of the former British colony.

But he thinks that when immigrants move to Canada from Hong Kong or elsewhere, they tend to choose churches because of personal invitations rather than by denomination.

Although Chinese Baptist churches tend to reach out to their own ethnic group, Belhous notes that some also have English pastors and offer an English-language service. "Most of the ethnic churches are needing to reach out in English, especially to their second generation," he says.

Ethnic churches often appeal to recent immigrants, but Bellous says that is not the case for Chinese Baptist churches. "The bulk of the congregations would be made up of people who've been here for some time."

BCOQ has set up a multicultural commission which looks at ways and means of reaching out to various ethnic groups. In addition, McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, which has Baptist connections, has set up a youth studies institute called Generation Next which is studying how ethnic churches can effectively reach out to their younger members.

Family ties

In the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Korean congregations are the most common ethnic group, with about 20 churches across Canada. The denomination also has congregations with services in Spanish, Portuguese, Cree, Taiwanese, Hungarian and Ukrainian.

Gordon Haynes, associate secretary of Canadian Ministries, says that Korean-Canadians are attracted to his denomination because "the Presbyterian church in Korea is the largest denomination over there." When Koreans move to Canada, many feel a "family tie" with the Presbyterian Church here and feel comfortable within its structures and roles, Haynes says.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has not done mission work in South Korea since 1925, says Haynes, but the denomination has close ties with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which is actively involved in mission work in South Korea.

Because of this and the memory of Canadian Presbyterian work in that country, many Korean immigrants tend to join Presbyterian congregations.

Some Presbyterian churches offer services in Korean; others have Korean and English services. Generally, the Korean congregations are growing faster than English ones, says Haynes.

Within the Presbyterian Church there are also some congregations that seek to be multicultural. In Toronto there are two Caribbean congregations, both of which have English-language services and focus on several nationalities from the Caribbean. Haynes notes that his church also does mission work in the Caribbean.

Mennonite connection

The Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) has a few churches with services in low-German, the historical language of many Mennonites, says conference pastor John Koop. Three of these are in small towns in Ontario and one is in Alberta. Part of Koop's work is co-ordinating these churches.

Koop notes that many low-German speaking Mennonites have recently immigrated to Canada from Mexico, which has helped these churches grow. One church in Winnipeg is developing a Spanish congregation, which is led by an immigrant from Paraguay. EMC does mission work in Paraguay and Mexico. Koop sees a connection between this and the growth of the Spanish congregation.

Historically, the Lutheran Church developed in Germany and Scandinavia, and this is reflected in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which still has many congregations that worship in German, Swedish or Finnish.

Mike Pryse, assistant to the bishop at the church's Eastern Synod office, notes that despite the Lutheran link to Europe, Chinese churches have also been developing rapidly, especially in larger cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

Evangelical Lutheran mission work focuses on South America and Papua New Guinea in particular, so Pryse sees no connection between his denomination's mission work overseas and its ethnic outreach in Canada.

Evangelical Lutheran churches tend to focus on a single ethnic group rather than taking a multicultural approach, he says.

TONY BOCK/TORONTO STAR

Rev. Richard Choe

Canada's United Church congregations are becoming more multicultural, says Rev. Richard Choe, general secretary of the United Church's ethnic ministries council.

Choe told the *Toronto Star* recently, "The congregations that used to be white European-based are changing into culturally diverse congregations." He adds that some churches focussed on one ethnic group are also becoming more diverse. For instance, one Japanese United church in Toronto now has a francophone minister, and another Japanese congregation in Montreal is welcoming Filipino and Pakistani Canadians.

Native outreach

The Anglican Church has been most successful in growing churches among Canada's native people, according to a national office spokesperson. Churches in the northern regions of Ontario and the prairie provinces offer services in native languages, such as Cree, and congregations in the Arctic hold services in Inuktituk.

Native Anglican congregations have been growing faster than those of any other ethnic group. This is due partly to the fact that the church was the first to evangelize certain parts of Canada and also because the church has a reputation for doing advocacy work with native groups.

But there is also a rainbow of other ethnic Anglican congregations, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Tamil, especially in the larger cities. Some churches take a multicultural approach, such as St. Michael and All Angels Church in Toronto, which has a multiethnic West Indian congregation.

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Editorial

You shall know a person by his highlighter

Two years ago I wrote about participating in a Bible marathon — reading the whole Bible in one year. I took part again this year, after skipping last year. Running through the Bible is much like jogging through a landscape: you don't often stop to smell the roses, but you get a pretty good overview.

Three more weeks to go, and I can say with Paul, "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

I do remember coming across particular passages that struck me. Why? I don't know. Things that strike one person often say something about that person. Show me your underlined passages in the Bible, and I will tell you who you are.

Let me share a few nuggets I picked up along the sometimes weary journey of getting that daily half hour of reading in.

The most ignorant

While reading Proverbs 30, I came across the sayings of Agur. We don't know much about Agur, but we find out here that he is quite humble. "I am the most ignorant of men," he proclaims; "I do not have a man's understanding." Wow, how many of us would be willing to introduce ourselves like that?

"I have not learned wisdom," he continues, "nor have I knowledge of the Holy One." That's a sight more realistic than those Christians who act as if they have God in their back pocket and who spout out all kinds of Bible verses to show their knowledge of the Holy One, don't you think?

The reason for Agur's self-deprecation becomes obvious as we read on. He is overwhelmed by the power and majesty of God. "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hand?" Agur's rhetorical questions act somewhat as boomerangs and become a challenge to us.

"Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!" Do we know more than Agur does? Do we really know God's name?

An NIV note reminds me that the Apostle Paul talked in a similar vein about himself in 1 Tim. 1:15. Agur may consider himself the most ignorant of men, but Paul, according to his own testimony, is the greatest sinner: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst." Paul is thinking back to the time when he was "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man" (vs. 13).

I suppose these two professions let us off the hook a bit. If Agur is the most ignorant person and Paul is the worst sinner, we can't lay claim to that distinction anymore. We have to settle for being a little less ignorant and sinful. Or should we not take these humble men's opinion of themselves as empirical evidence, but more as statements of their spiritual status in relation to God?

Shucks, is there no comfort for nitpickers?

A wonderful message, pastor

In Ezekiel 33: 31,32 I found a picture that reminds me of the way some people attend church services. The people of Israel sat down in front of the prophet Ezekiel to hear what he had to say, but they had no intention of putting any of it into practice. "With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain," we read.

And then God uses a picture that makes me think of the words of Jesus. God says: "Indeed, to them you [Ezekiel] are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice." Sound familiar? "What a beautiful sermon we heard this morning. Wasn't the singing great?" Yes, but where is that turning around 180 degrees in your life?

Jesus experienced a similar sense of discord in his audience. People came to sit at his feet and listen to what he had to say. But, says Jesus, "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'"

Ezekiel's audience may have made compliments about the prophecies they heard, but they did not dance or mourn any more than did Jesus' listeners.

Get a second opinion

Proverbs 18:17 is another easily overlooked treasure, and it comes to us courtesy of Solomon: "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." Ah, yes, Solomon knew all about that as a judge. There is more than one side to every story. Don't believe one person or group in a controversy until you have heard the others.

As a journalist I have to apply this concept all the time. When we write a news story, we often try to incorporate opposing views, lest we mislead our readers into thinking that one person's opinion is gospel truth. When I write editorials I often have to weigh other people's statements and beliefs. Of course, CC readers are also advised to apply this proverb to my editorials: "Witvoet seems right until a letter to the editor comes forward and questions him."

Dance to the tune

What these three passages I have underlined have in common is that they tell us something about truth. We need to recognize that the truth is far above us and that we need to be humble like Agur and Paul. If we love life, we had better dance to the tune of the truth and not fake it the way Ezekiel's audience did, or outright reject the gospel the way Jesus' listeners did. And we should not think, especially in conflict, that one person's opinion is the way it really is.

The best way to sum up a faithful response to all these challenges is to join the Psalmist as he celebrates the law of God in Psalm 119. "Your word [your truth] is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.... Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them.... Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble."

And with that message, I will close off this year's marathon of editorials. Let the Word have the last word.

Now that I have shared my underlined passages with you, perhaps you can tell me who I, the second-worst sinner, really am. **BW**

Christian Courier

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- *provide contact for the Christian community.*

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'Worldly' philosophies belong in the world, not the church

This is in response to the letter written by Dr. Remkes Kooistra (CC, Nov. 14). After reading the letter I was left with a feeling of "there is something wrong here." The feeling comes from years of asking the question my father always asked: how do I glorify God in this? Then on third reading I stopped at the word "unfulfilled." The word applied to a state of being lonely, and longing for a partner here on earth. I had never, up to this point in my life, considered my fulfillment to be outside God's order in this creation, nor will I expect it to be that way in the new creation.

There is much in the philosophy of the "world" about fulfillment and self-realization. It seems to me that the "world" has laid claim to one's thinking when this becomes the focus of one's life. When God is not recognized as the ultimate sovereign authority in one's life then this focus is laudable and my question: "How do I glorify God in this?" becomes redundant. As a matter of fact, a whole range of things such as seminaries and their presidents, synods and their pronouncements, confessions, etc., become redundant. Then the authority of changed decisions of the "mother church," be they right or wrong, can become our touchstones.

I would suggest that "worldly" philosophies may have their authority outside the church, but inside the church these should be tested against the ultimate authority of the word and the Word. If the "worldly" philosophy, such as that of self-fulfillment without God, is found wanting in this test, it should be denied space in our thinking.

Dirk Langerak
Whitby, Ont.

Promise Keepers are poor covenant keepers

Re: your editorial "Talk about the foolishness of the Promise Keepers" (CC, Oct. 17, 1997). Much has been written about the Promise Keepers. Can there really be something against this movement? An acquaintance who attended such a rally told me that it was electrifying and stimulating to see thousands of men raising their voices together in singing. It was an unforgettable day.... and, almost as an after thought, the speaker was good too. On a scale of one to 10, a nine for enthusiasm and a one for the message.

PK is a strange movement, something that can only happen in America with its history of big tent revivals and crusades. But then they at least know how to commercialize and sell their product. Are these rallies only for men, as the editor seems to say in his closing remark "When it comes to confession of sin and falling short of the glory of God, no gender lords it over the other?" PKs are poor covenant keepers by emasculating themselves to gender: no gender lords it over the other.

Apart from being "man centred," PK also has a strange view of ecumenism by removing denominational walls in a compromising way. PK as someone mentioned to me, wants to embrace all [Christian denominations] and they have for that reason changed their statement of faith to remove "justification by faith alone." This means not Christ alone who justifies, but Christ and the believers together. In other words a voluntary obedience. This is a polytheistic view of "Christ and someone else."

They (PK) therefore embrace a sacerdotal system of salvation and at the same time give a nod of approval towards a charismatic theology. The heart of the *Belgic Confession* is precisely that it is justification through faith alone (and *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q.59).

George Lieuwen
Langley, B.C.

How you and your church can better minister to those with disabilities

Rochelle Exelby

Persons with disabilities must be fully embraced and totally involved as active and responsive church members. They are entitled to the same benefits of being a member as anyone else is.

The church has the opportunity to reach those who have disabilities by welcoming them not only into itself as an institution, but into the family of God.

Basic suggestions when greeting and assisting a person with a disability:

- Do not group persons with disabilities into one category. Each person is an individual and there are many kinds of disabilities;
- Always approach from the front. You reduce the chance of taking the person by surprise.
- Always use a verbal greeting before touching a person (e.g., before hugging). Do not always expect a greeting that fits into the norm (e.g., a handshake).
- Speak clearly, not slowly (assuming the person can't understand you); face the person when talking to him or her.
- Always ask before doing something for a person: ask if he or she would like help, rather than assuming that help is needed.
- If possible, get down physically to the person's level when having a conversation so that you are at eye level with him or her.
- Never touch, take or handle an aid (cane, walker, wheelchair, guide dog) without asking first. Always tell the person where you put an item when you take it from him or her.

Items churches need in ministering to people with disabilities:

- Chair supports, for CRC churches often have hard pews.
- Reserved seating for persons with vision loss or hearing impairments. A church member should be available to demonstrate and hook up the system for the latter, if needed.
- Large-print hymnals, Bibles, praise books, bulletins. Find an agency that serves visually impaired persons.
- A tape of bulletin outlines and inserts, or whole services.
- Verbal dictating of the order of worship as it appears in the bulletin to help those with vision loss or cognitive difficulties.
- Avoid using overhead projectors; they become disabling for many people. If overheads are used, print song words, litanies or liturgical responses in the bulletin as well.

Form a local disabilities committee to address the following:

- Setting up a table with all the items available for members with a disability.
- Having someone at the table who is knowledgeable about all the items and can demonstrate their use. Also, making this designated person aware of all accessible routes in the building, as well as fire exits.
- Arranging for rides for those who need them.
- Reading on tape all information published concerning the congregation, and making the tape(s) available.
- Having resources available for any member (e.g., an interpreter).

Building points to consider:

- Clearly marked signs directing to main rooms (e.g., sanctuary, washrooms). They should be highly contrasted with black on white, large print and braille.
- Use of pictorials instead of script on signs, when possible.
- Providing a clearly defined wheelchair route.
- Avoiding solid glass doors, which are hazards to persons with impaired vision.
- Using florescent lighting, which provides the best light for the visually impaired.
- Installing air conditioning to help particularly seniors and persons with asthma and environmental allergies.
- Presenting a contrasting colored lip on the edge of stairs to deter falls.
- Painting the walls or a border a color which contrasts with the floor for persons with low vision.
- Having automatic doors, when possible, to assist persons with mobility disabilities.

Contact the Christian Reformed Church's Committee on Disability Concerns for further information at (616) 224-0801 or (616) 224-0837.

Rochelle Exelby is a member of the Christian Reformed Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Family/Arts Feature

The parable of the direction sheet

Marian den Boer

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, New Living Translation).

Flub-flup-flub-fluppity-flup-flup.

"Pull over right here," I directed Alison, my student-driver daughter. Alison, who like many beginning drivers had been driving rather close to the curb, brought the family van to a halt.

Directions help

We were blocking the inside lane of traffic on Upper Paradise Road during rush hour on a chilly autumn afternoon. As Alison fumbled for the two-way flashers, I stepped out to discover our rear right tire completely flat.

Since we were within a kilometre of home, 12-year-old Michelle and seven-year-old Amanda didn't waste any time. "May we walk home?"

"Tell Dad to come help me here," I called as they headed up the sidewalk.

Alison entertained the baby while I opened the rear van door and undid the side panel marked "Jack." The pocket behind the panel was filled with tire-changing paraphernalia including a tire-changers Bible in the form of a laminated direction sheet on a plastic ring attached to the van.

The instructions appeared rather convoluted so I decided to rely on my tire-changing experience which consisted mostly of watching other people change tires. I set the jack and jack handle under the van frame behind the wheel. There were arrows on the handle. I was still discerning between up and down when a couple walked by and stopped.

"My husband should be coming along soon," I said. The man picked up the jack and easily assembled it. "It looks like your husband will have to place the jack under the axle because it won't work where you have it," he discreetly remarked before continuing on his way.

Where was Marty? This steel was cold on my hands. Maybe I shouldn't have told that man about my husband.

"May I take Elizabeth home?" asked Alison. "Sure, and find out what happened to Dad."

After searching under all the seats I found the spare tire securely mounted under the body of the van. Now I could no longer avoid reading the instructions. I was supposed to stick the chisel end of the jack handle through the hole in the cargo door frame to wind down the spare tire.

What hole? I didn't see any hole. The accompanying diagram didn't look at all like reality. I poked the chisel end of the handle under the van, rather like waving an awkward magic wand, hoping to land it in a hole somehow. I reread the instructions. Then I opened the second cargo door. There was the hole in the frame, right where it was supposed to be.

How could they forget?

After finally dismounting the spare, I tried to loosen the wheel nuts on the flat with the wrench end of the jack handle. I tried each nut using all my strength but nothing budged.

Just as it was growing dark, Marty drove up, strode over, and smiled, "I would have been here sooner but Michelle and Amanda forgot all about you."

He loosened the nuts with his superior strength and placed the jack under the axle. In short order the tire was changed. I headed home with Marty's car and he took the tire to the local garage. By the way, the tire man at the garage found the end of a hairbrush embedded in one rather worn tire.

Marian den Boer lives with her husband, Marty, and five of their children in Hamilton, Ont. Their van now sports four brand new tires.

'How do you get to Carnegie Hall?' You 'click here'

Marian Van Til

Well, I've had my "15 minutes of fame" and I must say, it was an exhilarating experience.

On the afternoon of November 30 I was part of an 80-voice chorus which sang Handel's *Messiah* at New York's renowned Carnegie Hall, directed by the also renowned British composer/conductor John Rutter, whose church anthems and carols are probably the best known worldwide of any contemporary church composer.

How did this happen? Well, I "clicked here" and became part of "the world's first cyber-chorus."

Let me explain: One evening last summer I turned on my computer and signed on to our America Online (AOL) account.

A little blurb immediately enticed me with the news that AOL was offering the opportunity to sing *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall under John Rutter. The requirements were the submitting of an audition tape and being willing and able to pay for the trip from wherever you lived.

I got very excited. A few days later I made a tape, accompanying myself singing the alto *Messiah* aria "O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion," and sent it in. In late August I heard that I and about 80 others had been

MARIAN VAN TIL

John Rutter

accepted out of some 400 who had applied into what was being called the AOL Chorus.

I was, of course, gratified; but in the meantime, as I had tallied up how much the six-day trip to one of the world's most expensive cities would cost (even though the City is only about 450 miles away), I had pretty much nixed the whole idea in my mind.

You'll regret saying no

However, my husband, Ed, had other ideas. We could cut back on a few things we would normally do or buy, he said. It will be one of those proverbial once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, he said, and he didn't want me to miss it. (And he would go along to share it with me.)

I wavered. I consulted the participants in the rapidly growing "AOL Chorus message board," who all seemed to be vociferously enthusiastic, and for whom money seemed no object.

It turned out, once I raised my doubts, that some others felt the same. But most of them, like Ed, were sure that this was a one-time chance that they —and I — would be very sorry to have passed up.

A number of those who had already committed to the event turned out to be Christians; most of them urged me to pray about the situation.

One fiery New Jersey woman, Dee, who was very upfront about her faith, took my case in hand. (I learned the details when I finally met her in New York). Even her roommate got involved. They prayed that the Lord would provide if he wanted me (and Ed) to go. When we finally did decide to go, Dee and her friend (and some of the other would-be choristers) took it as an answer to their prayers.

I was, I confess, a little skeptical about that. Oh, not that I'm not a firm believer in answered prayer. But still having a few thrifty Dutch bones in my body, and also having had a sensible Reformed approach to prayer bred into me which eschews asking God for "frivolous" things that you happen to want (but could continue to live comfortably without), I wondered whose will it *really* was. Nevertheless, I got comfortable with the idea quickly, and began saving up for the occasion.

On November 26, Ed and I drove the five-hour trip to Albany, the state capital where a sister of Ed's lives.

After a good visit and night of rest, the next morning we were on the 8:15 Amtrak train to New York, a 2 1/2-hour trip (even in New York state, "New York" means "New York City").

A day for thanks

Not inappropriately, that was Thanksgiving Day in the U.S. The train from Albany to New York continuously hugs the Hudson River, a very pleasant trip. (There are many vestiges of the area's initial settling by the Dutch in that half of the state, including the places named Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Skuyler, Renssalaer and Yonkers (spelled with a Y, like Yonge Street in Toronto, so people know how to pronounce it).

We got into New York's Penn Station in time to hit the traffic tie-ups involved with the famous Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade (Macy's is only a few blocks from the station), but were settled into our hotel, the Grand Hyatt, by noon.

"The City That Never Sleeps" immediately grabs hold of you, seeming to be a living organism that catches you up in its whirlwind of activity.

Would we 'gel'?

That evening we would have our first rehearsal in a one of the hotel ballrooms and would meet John Rutter.

Though all of us in the chorus were trained singers and members of symphony or community choruses and church choirs, and a few of us were professional musicians, we all had the same question: would we, in a few days of rehearsals, be able to gel as a choir, producing a unified choral sound and singing *Messiah* as it should be sung? (We would be singing Part 1, the Christmas section, plus "Hallelujah!" and the final chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb.")

As I was a little early for the rehearsal I got a chance to meet and chat with Mr. Rutter right off. I'm not normally the kind of person who walks up and introduces herself in such a situation unless I actually have something to say.

Continued on page 7...

World's first cyber-chorus sings at Carnegie Hall

... *continued from page 6*

So I was happy that Toronto conductor and CBC choral music producer Robert Cooper, who directs the symphony chorus based in St. Catharines in which I'm a member (now called Chorus Niagara), had told me at our last rehearsal, "Say hello to John for me." Bob also conducts the Toronto Mendelssohn Youth Choir, and John Rutter would be guest conducting that choir on December 21.

So we had a mutual acquaintance to talk about. Pleasantly, Mr. Rutter turned out to be a self-effacing, seemingly introspective man with a healthy sense of humor.

On another day, we happened to walk back to the hotel together, and I learned something about his extensive travelling/conducting schedule — seven or eight countries this year alone.

Getting into the style

That first rehearsal was encouraging, even in that carpet-laden, sound-soaking ballroom. It was clear there were no "tag-alongs" in the chorus.

The next morning's rehearsal was six blocks away in the large basement of a gothic-style Catholic Church on Park Avenue — a much easier place to sing.

It quickly became obvious to me that though all but a couple of members had sung "Messiah" in concert before (and some had repeatedly), not everyone was attuned to the Baroque style it required: exuding a lightness and grace, largely achieved by a highly articulated, semi-legato style and almost fanatical attention to diction. ("Phantom of the Opera" it ain't!)

If Mr. Rutter had any qualms at that point, he kept them to himself. But it didn't surprise me that articulation and diction were the things he worked on with us almost exclusively.

He assured us that the superb but rather live acoustics at Carnegie Hall would make a mish-mash of our singing if we didn't incorporate the detached style and exaggerated pronunciation of consonants that he stressed.

That afternoon we had male/female sectionals to refine the running passages like those in "For Unto Us a Child is Born." We were led by a different conductor and accompanist, which was musically frustrating because neither of them was nearly as precise as Rutter was, and it was clear that they had no special knowledge of *Messiah*.

Saturday morning we were back with John Rutter. Things picked up considerably. And Mr. Rutter was gracious enough to spend considerable time beforehand and during a break autographing title pages of our "Messiah" books or copies of his own compositions that people had brought for him to sign.

MARIAN VAN TIL

I felt a real high as I walked back to Ed's and my hotel room. The singers were adapting to Rutter's wishes and things were coming together well. I began to look forward to our performance with exuberance instead of enthusiasm mixed with trepidation.

That night Ed and I visited the awe-inspiring cavern that is St. Patrick's Cathedral, as our schedule the next morning — the first Sunday of Advent — would prevent us from going to church.

No photos inside

At 9:30 a.m. buses would leave the Hyatt for The Hall. We would have to be in concert dress, as our "dressing room" at Carnegie was really an orchestra room with no actual dressing space available, except small washrooms for each gender.

I confess I felt a surge of self-importance as we all left the bus and were led around to the back of this very famous brown brick building, and, one at a time, greeted the doorwoman who held open the stage door for our arrival.

As Carnegie Hall has strict rules about not taking photographs in the hall itself (it's actually a "copyrighted space," John Rutter told us), Ed was reduced to taking a picture of me in the dressing room underneath a sign which warned that Carnegie Hall is not responsible for lost or stolen articles.

Of course, we could photograph the outside of the building: to the left of the front doors a very large poster bearing a picture of John Rutter announced our concert. (The first, shorter section of the concert involved a combined chorus singing Rutter's own "Magnificat.")

Elegance and intimacy

Stepping out onto that famous stage for the first time brought broad smiles to the faces of every chorister. One could only gape in appreciation at the four gracefully curved balconies, with a fifth, straight gallery so high that the immense ceiling is only a matter of feet away.

The predominant colors are red and gold, leaving an impression of both elegance and festivity. The hall, though fairly large, is more recital hall than concert hall, intimate like a good opera house, without being confining.

The dress rehearsal with the Brooklyn Philharmonic and the four soloists went well. Rutter was pleased, but asked for still more enunciated diction and cleanness of musical line.

As the arias were being sung, the whole chorus simply sat down in place on the wide risers, most of us too involved in the moment to worry about whether our good clothes were getting dirty.

Spouses of chorus members were allowed to attend any or all rehearsals. Most, however, like Ed, didn't come along until the dress rehearsal. As a non-musician he found the rehearsal and how it was run very interesting, he said.

Finally, we had time to eat lunch and wander around for a while. However, this was the only time it rained while we were there so we stayed holed up in a place called Cafe Europa for quite some time. It felt a little odd to be dressed in evening wear in the middle of the day, but this was New York, and no one seemed to notice.

Just before concert time we each were handed a "stagebill," the program in which, we were delighted to see, were printed each of our names — and e-mail addresses. (After all, we all "met" online.)

'This is it!'

At concert time I, being tall and at the end of the back row, was the first chorus member on stage. The orchestra was relaxing and audience members were chatting as we appeared. Though there was virtually a full house I wasn't nervous, only excited.

From the start, the concert went very well. I found that standing for an hour and a half, as we had to do (sometimes a grueling chore), wasn't too difficult the more I became enwrapped in the music.

Since the first time I sang *Messiah* in concert, when I was in high school and my mother was dying of cancer, certain passages have always brought a lump to my throat, if not out-and-out tears to my eyes.

Whatever their personal stories, most singers who believe the message they're singing have the same experience. For me it's often when we proclaim in the "Hallelujah" chorus that Christ is "King of Kings, Lord of Lords; and he shall reign forever and ever." What an astonishing culmination to human history as we know it! The stupendousness of that confession makes all human achievement melt into jelly, I think.

It's amazing what thoughts can go through your head even while you're singing expressively and remembering all the technical things that need doing.

When it was all over, we actually got a standing ovation. I was astonished. New Yorkers are (supposedly, anyway) notoriously tough audiences. I didn't let it impress me because I figured there were a lot of friends and relatives of both our chorus and the other chorus in the crowd. And a lot of holiday visitors to New York. So they were predisposed to being a friendly (and perhaps slightly indiscriminating) audience.

But that left a lot of other people who were also standing. I had to admit. Ed, not a standing-ovation-kind-of-guy, led the standing troops in his area of the main floor seats.

"See?" I said. "That proves my point. You all had connections to chorus members!" But Ed insisted that the emotion behind the ovation was very real, and could be felt in the audience. So that was a gratifying and unexpected icing on what had turned out to be a very delectable cake.

Last week, with each chorister returned to his or her slightly more mundane daily life, Mid-America Productions, which along with AOL sponsored the event, sent each of us a copy of a letter from John Rutter.

'It went splendidly'

In typically understated British fashion, he admitted that he had taken a risk in agreeing to conduct the first-ever cyber-choir. After all, we could have really blown it, thus sullying his considerable reputation (he did not actually say that, of course, but he knew, and we knew, the potential for failure was there).

However, he gambled that we "would probably be a sharp-witted and dedicated group — and thus it turned out to be!"

If the ovation was the icing, Mr. Rutter's compliments were the flowers on the icing: "Well, you have made history! You achieved everything I hoped you would.... I think it went splendidly, and the audience obviously thought so too."

He is considering doing it again. For me, once in a lifetime was just right.

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Church

McCaughey family thanks God for blessing of seven babies

CARLISLE, Iowa (EP) — Kenny McCaughey, father of the world's only surviving septuplets, summed up his feelings in one word: "Wow!"" McCaughey's wife, Bobbi, gave birth to four boys and three girls on Nov. 19.

The septuplets, in birth order, are: Kenneth Robert (3 pounds, 4 ounces), Alexis May (2 pounds, 11 ounces), Natalie Sue (2 pounds, 10 ounces), Kelsey Ann (2 pounds, 5 ounces), Brandon James (3 pounds, 3 ounces), Nathaniel Roy (2 pounds, 14 ounces), and Joel Steven (2 pounds 15 ounces).

Marlys Popma, a spokeswoman for the family, called the McCaugheys "one of the strongest families of faith I've ever had the opportunity to associate myself with." She added, "After the babies were born, there were tears, there were hugs, there were prayers and the family broke out in a hymn to the Lord."

Both parents spoke openly about their Christian faith, which led them to reject the advice of doctors who urged them to abort some of the children.

Iowa's pro-life leaders praised the McCaughey (pronounced "McCoy") family for their commitment to life. "What greater message for the right-to-life movement than that this family, when faced with what was really a tough decision, took the high road and really allowed God to make that decision," said Ruth Beyer, the executive director of Iowa Right to Life.

Very different results

The McCaugheys had difficulty conceiving their first child, eventually turning to a fertility drug to conceive their daughter Mikayla. When they decided to try for a second pregnancy, Bobbi again used the same daily doses of Metrodin — but with dramatically different results.

The birth came by cesarean section just 30 weeks and four days into the pregnancy. Bobbi had been hospitalized for more than a month, and confined to a bed for much longer. She measured 55 inches around before giving birth — nearly her height.

Kenny McCaughey was "ecstatic" about the births, he said. But he made it clear that he would not permit his children to become celebrities. "This is my family," he insisted. "That's what I want it to be and it's just going to be us, and we're not on display." Kenny said his "commission as a father" is to try to raise all their children "in a normal Christian home."

Doctor says it's a miracle

The McCaugheys weren't the only ones praising God for a safe delivery. "I believe that this delivery is a miracle delivery," said Dr. Paula Mahone, who cared for Bobbi and performed the delivery. "I certainly believe that God has to be glorified through this situation."

Mahone told Reuters News Service, "One of the reasons I believe this is my faith. The other reason is just looking at the technical difficulties here. It is miraculous that she didn't have any medical problems through the entire pregnancy. It is miraculous that she was able to comply with the bed rest. She didn't have any clinical depression. She wasn't sick.... There is no explanation as far as the medicine is concerned."

Modest means

The McCaugheys are a family of modest means: Kenny is a billing clerk at an auto dealership; Bobbi is a seamstress. But they're getting a lot of help — from members of their church (who have volunteered time to do laundry, housework, cooking, and babysitting services); from Kenny's employer (who donated a van); from Iowa Governor Terry Branstad and a number of Iowa firms (who have promised to build a larger house for the family).

They'll also get free utilities, 16 years of apple juice, seven car seats, major appliances, a year of free groceries, furniture, Gerber's baby food, seven years of cable TV and Pampers diapers for life (about 32,000).

Looking ahead, two colleges have offered the children free tuition: St. Ambrose University, a Roman Catholic college in Davenport, Iowa, did so to congratulate the family for rejecting abortion; Hanibal-LaGrange College, a Baptist-affiliated school in Missouri, offered full-ride scholarships to the children of this Baptist family.

Currently, the babies are still being cared for in hospital but are expected to go home near their original due date in late January.

Wintersun in Portugal

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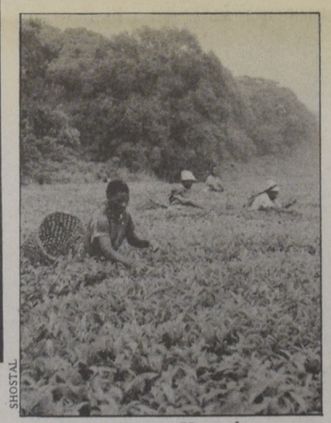
Famine challenges Ugandan churches



SHOSTAL

Tea harvesters in Uganda.

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (REC) — Light spring rains have caused a food shortage in Uganda and parts of Kenya. People are dying of hunger, and inflation has risen to about 10 per cent a month because of the shortages. The incidence of malaria has also increased.

According to Paul Kudoyi, general secretary of the Uganda-based Christian Reformed Church in East Africa, the church is also hindered. In a letter to the REC, he reported that he spends his days "looking for ways and means to feed the family."

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization predicted in April that Uganda could not feed itself. It estimated 491,000 persons who need food aid this year. A July report of the World Food Program estimated 793,000 would need food aid.

In Tanzania, which borders Kenya and Uganda on the south, there is also a food shortage. President Mpaka has declared a national emergency and banned all food exports. In Ethiopia, to the north of Kenya, the available food is only about half of the need.

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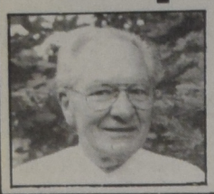
Reformed Sri Lankans celebrate 150 years of Sunday School

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (REC) — The Sunday School movement came early to the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka. The first school opened May 2, 1847, about 60 years after the first schools began in England. In July the DRC celebrated the 150th anniversary of the schools.

Four of the original 13 schools still function today. A few closed because of population shifts, and many have been added since.

Church

Chapter & Verse



Wayne Brouwer
● Andrew Kuyvenhoven
Laura Smit
Al Wolters

Christmas musings

More than 60 years ago, on the first Christmas I can remember, we had a performance by the Sunday school in which I was a student. They made me stand on a chair and sing a song. I don't remember the song and I don't recall who else was singing. But I remember that I was wearing "sissy" pants which my mother had knitted. I also recall that I got a big orange on that day and that all of us drank chocolate milk.

The Christmases of my childhood in the Netherlands were highlighted by the feast of the Sunday school. The feast was on the 26th of December. We called it "second day of Christmas" and the British called it Boxing Day.

Although John Calvin, the early Reformers and the later Puritans considered the observance of Christmas an undesirable invention of the Roman church, the Calvinists of the Lowlands went all out in their religious celebrations of the birth of Christ. We never tired of singing the Christmas songs. We had two worship services on December 25th and another one on the second day of Christmas, in addition to the feast of the Sunday school.

Camel's nose in the tent

Present giving was strictly separated from the Christmas observance. Gifts were exchanged on St. Nicholas Day, December 5th. Christmas trees and other decorations were frowned upon, but they slowly slipped into the Calvinistic homes. These early Christmas trees with candle-holders were a sight to behold. The flickering flames were so beautiful and so dangerous.

In my first Canadian congregation, Lethbridge, Alta., the proposal of the choir to have a Christmas tree in church was "manfully" rejected by the consistory. But the following year they decorated with boughs and branches. The camel's nose was in the tent.

Today no Christian Reformed Church observes Christmas without five candles in the correct colors. And most church buildings have been decorated — most of them soberly, some of them sumptuously.

Most of us have become religious observers of liturgical seasons. In the Woodlawn CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., to which I belong, four- and five-year-old children must learn the cycle of the church's liturgy that begins with Advent, then Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and then the "Sundays after Pentecost" until Advent, when the cycle starts over again.

Art and artiface

Every liturgical season also has a particular color, and we have more and more liturgists in our churches who are experts in this sort of thing. Ten or 15 years ago Christian Reformed people had no idea what Epiphany was or how even to pronounce the word.

The liturgical cycle will give us many treasures from the church of all ages. But the cycle also limits us. We must always be the church after Pentecost, even in Advent. The cycle is artificial; it's a teaching tool. Real life is a pilgrimage to the New City, a race to be run, a mission to be fulfilled.

Well, the memory of all my Christmases is associated with happiness. The format has changed; the substance hasn't.

Andrew Kuyvenhoven is a retired Christian Reformed minister who lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Tamminga urges elders to recharge spiritual batteries

Valerie Walker

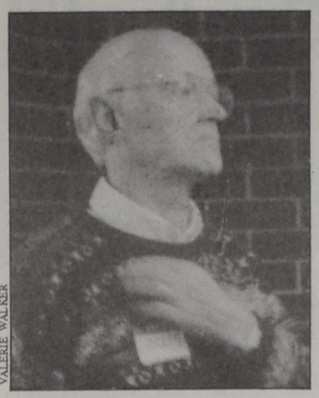
HALIFAX, N.S. — On Nov. 7 and 8 the Christian Reformed Home Missions Committee of Classis Eastern Canada invited elders, spouses and interested persons to a leadership workshop held at John Calvin CRC, Truro, Nova Scotia. The workshop leader was Rev. Louis Tamminga, who was winding up four months of interim "pastoring" at All Nations CRC, Halifax.

Approximately 40 men and women attended, with representation from the CRCs in Fredericton, N.B., Charlottetown, P.E.I., Milford and Halifax, N.S., and the host church, Truro. Many were currently serving as elders in their churches but at least 10 per cent of those attending were simply interested in the role of the elder in CRC congregations.

Tamminga spent an evening and morning session discussing the care of the elders' spiritual life. This may have come as a surprise to some, who came expecting the nitty gritty how-to's of being an elder, which were not addressed until later.

Looking for perspective

Dale Poel, an elder from All Nations CRC, said that he came looking for "some sense of perspective, some guidelines" to help when the tasks of council seem to go in so many directions. Poel said he gained a "new and more focussed" sense of the role of elder. He was also encouraged to hear that the "old fashioned" idea of visiting everyone once each year was still feasible. The All Nations council requires two elders to attend each visit and finds these visits increasingly difficult to schedule. That, along with suggestions about ministering to university students and dealing with grown covenant children who disappear from church life but remain on the church list, were "hot" topics during the times allotted for questions.



VALERIE WALKER

Rev. Louis Tamminga

Bill Masselink, of Charlottetown CRC, who attended out of personal interest, was encouraged by the heavy emphasis on prayer and "being quiet before the Lord." He came away from the workshop convicted of a council's need to be organized about how it does things, and purposeful in its work, perhaps adopting a mission statement to give focus.

'Ongoing affirmations'

Jack Verboom, a new elder at Faith Community Church, Milford, N.S., took Tamminga's advice to be a "record keeper" to heart. The Milford church has a high level of interaction with its community. Even though its programs are not exceptionally large, it has a very high proportion of non-members attending. A case in point is the Gems (formerly Calvinettes) group, which has the highest percentage of unchurch participants in the denomination. Verboom sees record-keeping as the only way to provide ongoing affirmations to the people he encounters in his work as elder.

Tamminga also addressed the issue of time management for elders, especially considering their family needs. He urged elders to make concrete plans, to make themselves accountable for goals regarding visiting and carrying out church work. These practical tips were most helpful in tackling their daunting tasks. Even more encouraging was Tamminga's focus on the strength and guidance given by the Spirit to those who minister to God's people.

VanderVelde invited to Catholic Synod of Bishops in Rome

TORONTO (ICS) — Dr. George Vandervelde of the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) was invited to and attended as a fraternal delegate the Catholic Synod for America, which took place in Rome from Nov. 16 - Dec. 12.

Vandervelde was selected in recognition for his contributions to the issue of church unity, both in his writing and in his practical ecumenical work.

An article he wrote in a recent issue of the Montreal based periodical *Ecumenism/ Oecumenisme* led to his invitation. In it, he examined the ecumenical dimensions of the first draft of a preparatory document for the synod.

Vandervelde is professor of systematic theology at the Institute for Christian Studies, and is cross-appointed to the Toronto School of Theology (Wycliffe College). He is a periodic contributor to *Christian Courier*.

The Synods of Bishops is a special consultative assembly which was called by Pope John Paul II in 1994 in order to reform and advise the Pope in his desire for a new evangelization in America. It brings together the churches from many diverse regions and focuses on the problems of justice and economic relations between the nations of America.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' delegation to the synod comprised 15 people, including 10 bishops.

Vandervelde attended the final two weeks of the synod.

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Short Story

WE HAVE WINGS

Everette Neese

It was a proud day in the life of Rayme Black when he clicked his heels, squared his shoulders and stood at attention as his commanding officer pinned his "wings" on him. It signified his attainment of professional competence in handling a powerful and complex weapon.

To this young man, these "wings" meant one thing above all others. It meant confidence in his own abilities and confidence in the proficiency of his machine.

I present this mental picture to you in the hope that you will ponder a contrast. Our life in this world does not furnish us many moments like that. It's not often that we straighten our backs and look life directly in the eye and have pinned on us the insigna of our ability to cope with things.

Life is a confusing thing to many of us. If there have been times when we thought that we were able to cope with life on our own, we have had that confidence shaken. *Our wings have been clipped."*

To some of us the symbol is appropriate. David said in Psalm 55:6, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest."

He was longing for what he did not have and there are many in that position today. Some have found the rest and peace they desired and have done it because they have "wings" that will lift and carry them in time of anxiety and trouble. Wings of hope, and trust and faith. Wings of confidence, peace and assurance.

A while ago I came across this bit of verse:

Let us learn from the bird
For a moment to take
Sweet rest on a branch
That is ready to break.

She feels the branch tremble,
Yet gaily she sings.
What is that to her?
She has wings!

A bird sits on a limb that swings... and sings — because she has wings.

Are we different

That is natural for a bird. She has no concern; if the branch breaks she will not fall with it. She has wings, and that is enough for her safety.

With us, however, it is different. Is it? Does it have to be? Are our confidence, assurance and peace necessarily less than hers?

Parading through my mind at the moment is the story of the prophet Elisha and the Shunammite woman. The woman saw the prophet pass her house day after day in the administration of his prophetic duties. She invited him in one day for a meal. Often after that he would stop and eat and be refreshed.

As time passed she and her husband fitted up a little room for the man of God to spend the night when travelling through their area. The Shunammite woman carried a deep sorrow because she was childless. When the prophet knew that, he assured her that God would grant her desire and she would bear a son.

Later in this story when the boy was old enough to be helpful in the fields he evidently suffered sunstroke and was sent home, where his mother cared for him until noon; but he died.

Now, what could she do? The joy in her heart turned to stern determination. She told her husband that she needed a servant and she wanted an ass saddled for a quick ride to go and get the prophet. When her husband hesitated she saddled the animal herself and hurried off to Mt. Carmel to find Elisha.

The prophet saw her coming and sent his servant, Gehazi, to meet her and ask her, "Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?"

All is well

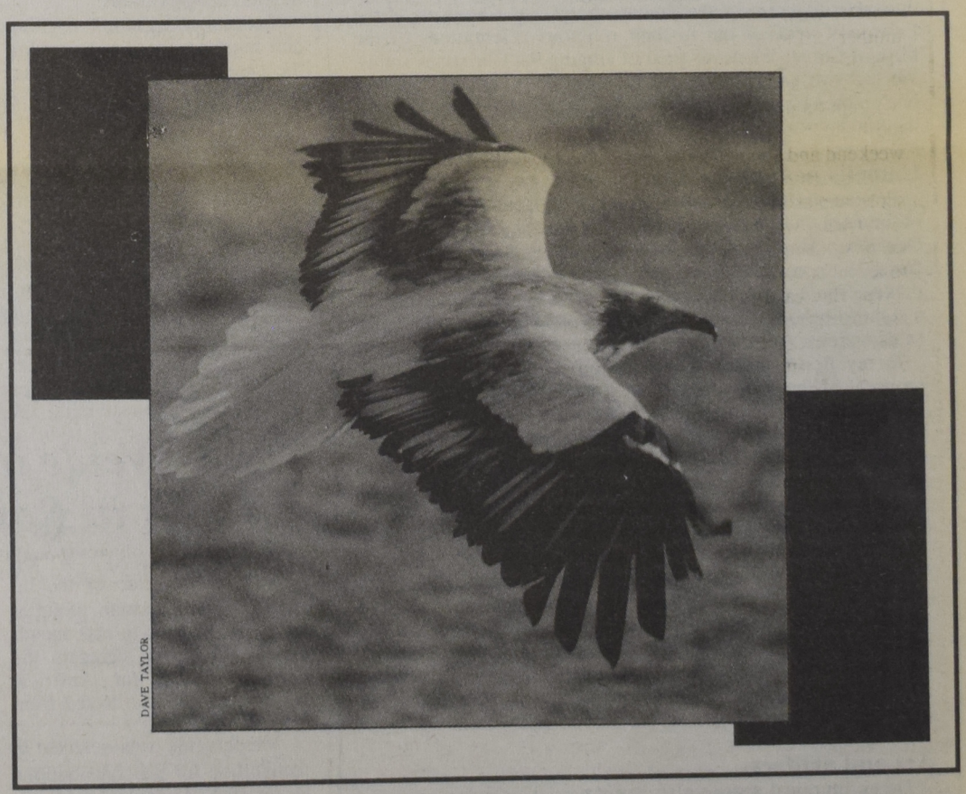
What was her answer? Although she was sad to the core of her soul, she managed to respond, "It is well." Facing the greatest grief of her life, she could nevertheless say, "It is well."

How could she do it? It's all so simple, yet profound. She was trusting God, the God of the prophet. That God had come to her aid before and she was sure he would do it again. She was like the bird, sitting on a shaking, swinging, trembling limb which broke underneath her.

But she could sing. She had "wings." Wings of hope and faith and trust. Wings of confidence, peace and assurance.

We all know the story of Job. How in rapid succession he lost his possessions and finally his sons and daughters. In all of this, however, he had one standing refrain: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Then in a final triumphant shout he said, "I know that my redeemer liveth. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

Do you see the picture? A man broken, children gone, forsaken by his wife and abused by his friends. And yet he could shout, "I know. I *know*."


DAVE TAYLOR

A bird sits on a limb and swings...
and sings —
because she has wings.

Truly Job had "wings" of hope, faith, trust, confidence. So, whatever happened to him, *all was well.*

In the early days of my ministry I served a small church in a mill village in North Carolina. Among my "flock" was an old man who had lived beyond his allotted threescore years and ten. He was enjoying the slow sunset of his life. He knew that the trembling, shaking limb of life might break at any moment.

His constant refrain about life was:

"If I live, I am the Lord's,
If I die, I am the Lord's.
Whether I live or die, what does it matter,
I am still the Lord's."

Wings of hope and faith and trust. *All was well.*

Farther down the river from my church was another cotton-mill village in which lived a particular family. Though not members of my parish, I visited them occasionally. At one time they were people of substance but in the Great Depression they had lost most of what they once had. They were just hanging on to the ragged edge of subsistence.

There had been much sickness; the wife was an invalid; the daughter had to give up her own life to care for her parents. They were sitting on a trembling limb, but they could sing. They had wings.

The Lord provides

In my mind's eye I can still see the old gentleman sitting in his rocking chair, dressed in patched but clean overalls, looking like an old patriarch with his white flowing beard. I still remember him saying, "I once was young, but now I am old; but I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." Then he would look this young preacher in the eye and say, "The Lord will provide."

Such were his "wings." *All was well.* As I stood beside his deathbed quoting from the 14th chapter of John, "In my Father's house are many rooms," I seemed to hear the "Amen" of his spirit, singing as it winged its way from earth: *All is well.*

The Christian faith has continued to live and grow because it gives people *wings* — of confidence, assurance, peace.

The branch we sit on may swing in the wind, but we can sing because we have wings. *All is well.*

Everette Neese is a retired pastor who lives in Lexington, North Carolina.

Personal Experience

Nothing is automatically granted

Ron Holt

We all take things and people for granted sometimes, loved ones in particular. My mother passed away one morning in April 1990. Since then, the feeling of loss is always with me, whether I think about it or not.

Being a single parent with five kids, Mom had her hands full. We weren't all real close but we did love one another. People would describe me as the black sheep of the family. I was about 14 years old when I had my first drink of alcohol. That started me on a particular journey, and I had no way of knowing where it was going to take me.

For the next 25 years I continued to drink, not realizing how caught up I had become in the sickness of alcoholism. I isolated myself from the rest of my family, and was married and divorced in a short period of time. God did grace me with a beautiful daughter, but Jessica was only eight months old when my wife and I separated.

As she was growing up I hid my drinking pretty well from her, but regretfully, it was a different situation with my mother. I couldn't or wouldn't see what I was doing to her as she watched her son destroy himself.

I did things like steal money, fight with her, and say things I wish I could but will never be able to take back. My mother still loved me through it all and stood by me when the rest of my family turned their backs. When she passed away though, I was truly alone.

I kept on drinking, though. I guess I wasn't deep enough in the hole I was digging for myself. I saw my daughter each weekend and Jessica never had a clue I was drinking.

Although she meant the world to me, I often cut my visits short because I craved a drink. Sometimes that's all I'd think about when we were together. I cut our visits short so often I know it made her feel bad. I just made excuses for why I had to leave early.

The day came when my ex-wife told me she was moving and taking Jessica away with her. This was a shock to me. I didn't even see it coming. My ex-wife explained how she had met a man and was in love with him. She reassured me how nice he was and told me about a small farm he owned in a distant state.

Here I was with a job, but that was all. I was living in a 12-foot trailer and barely able to take care of myself. I thought about trying to stop her, but alcohol had pretty much taken control of me, mentally and physically.

I came to the conclusion that she did take good care of Jessica, so that was the only consolation I had. I signed the release papers so she could legally leave the state with our daughter, and they moved in November of 1995.

I promised Jessica I would fly out there to visit in late spring. I wrote twice a week but still missed her so much. April, May and June were here and gone. July 13th I received a heart-breaking letter from my daughter, telling how disappointed she was in me. I didn't make it out to see her that spring because I drank up the money for the air fare. I couldn't take it any more. I finally hit bottom.

I haven't taken a drink since that day. Eight months have passed and by the grace of God I remain sober. I'm doing fine and am in touch with myself and my daughter. When I think of Mom I know she's proud of me — finally.

I wanted to write this story to tell you to take the time to show people how much you really care about them. I don't think it's ever too late to change, but your loved ones may not have the time to wait around, so live each day knowing this.

I've been told that we should live as if we are in the continual presence of the Lord. This advice helps me to remember not to take things for granted like I used to.

Ron Holt lives in Santa Ysabel, Calif.

The clap of an angel's wing

Didy Prinzen

It was a sobering experience when I walked into the nursing home — from all the artificial Christmas cheer of the shopping centre straight into the reality of a broken world. And I felt more at home *here*.

As I walked past some of the home's residents in the halls and lounge, upstairs to where my friend stayed, I felt, as always, strangely guilty for being well and able to enjoy life.

I found my friend sitting in a chair beside his bed in the room he shared with four other gentlemen. I was glad that he was out of bed. Not that it meant much. Because even though he was present in body, I wondered where his soul was wandering.

I pulled up a chair right in front of him and took his hand in mine and said, "Hello, Paul, how are you doing?" and I told him who I was. As always, there was no reaction! Not that I expected one. There was a time when Paul laughed out loud when I mentioned my name, but that was a long time ago!

Whenever he *was* awake, as he was now, he kept his eyes fixed on my face, as if searching for something, I always thought. Showing him a pretty, red, artificial poinsettia, I said, "Look, Paul, I brought you a plant today." He looked at it and followed me with his eyes as I put the plant on the night table. I was silently hoping that it would provide a happy note at this time of year in this bare room.

When I sat down again I said, "You know, Paul, it's soon going to be Christmas, when we'll remember the Lord Jesus' birth!" I was, as always, hoping that something would penetrate his clouded mind.

There had been a time when together we looked through a photo album and a children's story Bible and when, by a smile or a laugh, one could tell that Paul recognized some of the pictures. But that was a couple of years ago. The disease that was ravaging his mind and body had taken more and more away from him.

Paul kept looking steadily at me as if expecting something. In the years before he became ill, Paul had enjoyed playing the piano on Sunday afternoons in our home and had loved to have me by his side singing the familiar hymns. So I thought I'd sing for him — something I did once in a while when I visited him. This evening I sang a whole repertoire of Dutch Christmas carols he and I knew so well, "*De herdertjes lagen bij nachte*" "*'t Was nacht in Beth'lem's dreven....*"

Paul's eyes never left my face. It was as though the two of us were celebrating a little bit of Christmas together there in that dimly lit room. And it was so good! I felt another Presence there with us and was hoping that Paul might sense it too. The other residents were quiet. Were they watching and listening too?

It was then that a nurse came in on quiet feet. She looked at us there in the corner of the room, then asked me, "Did you know, Paul?" I said, "Yes, Paul was my friend." I wondered why we used past tense. And there was something about that nurse's quiet countenance that made me add sadly, "But he doesn't know me anymore."

The nurse then said a rather strange thing. She replied, "That doesn't matter. As long as we are faithful." She was a "kindred spirit!" I had sensed it. And I marvelled at the fact that the Christian spirit sometimes shines through, even without anything having been said that directly indicates that it is present. And moments later, when leaving the room, she looked at us once more, smiled and said, "May God bless you."

And I *felt* blest! I thought, "Yes, indeed, all that really matters is that we are faithful!" That's what my friend Paul had been! Faithful in following his heart's desire to further the Kingdom of God. Faithful to his calling as a Christian educator, with such a great love and concern for children with learning disabilities. Faithful for as long as he had been able.

It was time to say goodby. I always hated to leave him. Tonight, however, I felt comfort. I had heard the clapping of an angel's wing! I knew beyond doubt that when this lonely man's journey would end he would hear; "Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt.25:21).

Didy Prinzen lives in Orono, Ont.

Feature

Medical missionary embodies a foreign concept: *God's love*

Walfried E. Goossen

"Faith of the martyrs, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death"

Few people understand the meaning of those words as Dr. Stephen Foster does. Foster is a medical missionary in Kalukembe, Angola.

On Boxing Day of 1985, Alfonso, a 34-year-old colleague confided his frustration to Foster. Alfonso had been stationed with one of the desert tribes, the Cuvale, for three unproductive years, teaching them about the love of God.

They couldn't comprehend it. They had no word for love in their language. "No one has ever loved a Cuvale that much," the villagers explained. They had lived in tribal conflicts and wars for generations.

Foster encouraged the disheartened missionary as best he could. A few hours later Alfonso started out on the 400 km trip to his mission station, his jeep packed with medical supplies and 10 co-workers. An hour later Alfonso and four others in the group were dead, killed by guerillas.

The 800 amputations Foster has had to perform on landmine victims is a heartbreak for him.

In spite of the devastating shock, Foster and his colleagues continued to send the Cuvale supplies and teach them about love.

A well-known hymn says, "There's power in the blood [of Jesus]." Martyr's blood is powerful too. It is the blood of Christ.

The violent deaths touched the Cuvale deeply. "We understand now something about what you mean by love," they told Alfonso's widow. "Alfonso came to us with medical supplies and to help us. He risked his life and died. Now you [missionaries] are continuing to come to us only because we are here, not because you have to." The story of Jesus dying for them out of love began to make sense. It was a beginning.

More love in action

The hospital in Kalukembe was founded in 1927 by Swiss missionaries. Foster's grandfather took up this work in 1944 and was succeeded by his son, Foster's father, in 1950. Foster was the only surgeon on staff when he went to Angola in 1976.

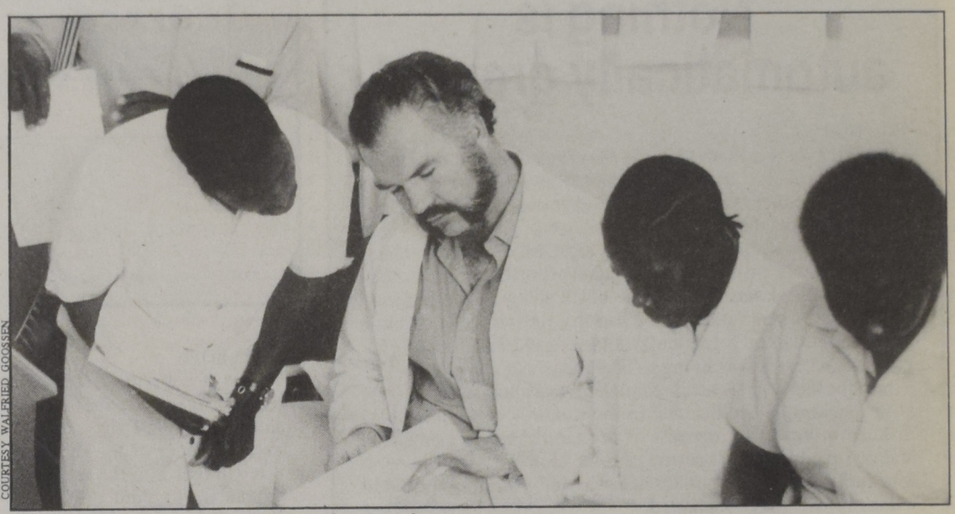
One of the more difficult questions he had to face when he accepted the call to Angola was what it would do to his family. His daughter Heather was eight months old, and Rebecca two years.

When asked how they like Angola they join in an enthusiastic chorus of, "I love Angola, I want to go back." When any of the Fosters talk about "we" and "our country" they usually mean Angola. Foster was himself only eight months old when his parents took him to Zambia in 1950 where he grew up before returning to Canada.

His wife, Peggy, offers both spiritual and emotional support (and receives it from Stephen), she, too, had to set aside anxieties about their children and trust them to God in a risk-laden environment. And accept their absences when they remained in Canada for educational purposes.

Peggy is as fully immersed in mission work as Stephen is. In Angola she does visitations with the elderly and shut-ins who can't come to church. Bible study is also among her first priorities. She plays the electric organ at church, leads the choir, and teaches English-as-a-second-language. She also educates their children Rebecca, Heather, Rachel and Rob. As energetic as her husband, she also hosts many international visitors to the seminary in Lubango.

Now in Canada, the Fosters will be together as a complete family for a whole year. A rare privilege. Perhaps that heightens their sense of being a family. But danger and separations have not detracted from their love, good will and humor. One feels after an evening with them that this is a loving and warm group of happy people, dedicated to a common cause and each other.



COURTESY WALFRIED GOOSSEN

Stephen Foster at work in Kalukembe, Angola.

Landmines a curse

By the mid-1980s, the 400-bed hospital treated about 500 patients a day with a staff of four doctors and a supporting cast, often working with basic equipment and a shortage of trained staff. Foster taught the three non-specialists surgical techniques.

The 800 amputations he has had to perform on landmine victims is a heartbreak for him. "There are about 10 million people in Angola and 10 million landmines," he exclaims, a mixture of well controlled anger and sorrow in his voice. The spectacle of innocent women, children and men torn apart, raw flesh and bones hanging from twisted bodies, the cries of excruciating pain have perhaps been the most emotionally challenging aspect of his work. For almost 10 years he wouldn't talk about it.

Surrounding the Kalukembe hospital is a village of some 5,000 people, most of them relatives of the patients. Many patients come from distant places. This necessitates temporary housing for their families. Often a patient stays with them in a small hut and the family nurses him or her back to health under supervision of the staff. This greatly increases the number of people who can be treated at one time. Families visit for a few days and longer, even for a year, determined by the condition of the patient.

Foster is a visionary. A gentle yet dynamic man, he is passionate about Angola. His interest does not stop with medicine and religion. He seems somewhat restless, he's very energetic and eager for more challenges. He sees Angola as a broken society in transition, one which will have to take giant leaps from a simple agrarian culture to a silicone chip culture to keep pace with the modern world and to achieve any peace and prosperity. It will need to quickly adapt to many changes which have happened gradually in most of the Western world.

Education is a high priority. He hopes to develop medical training facilities for native Angolans. Bible school, university and a seminary are all essentials to teaching the Angolans to help themselves. "We are multipliers of effectiveness," he says. "By training the Angolans they won't be as dependent on outside help."

Cautiously hopeful

His vision for Angola is cautiously hopeful. Because of the range of his interests and Angola's huge needs he is willing to take anyone who has a skill and can share his or her faith in Christ in his or her work. "Most bridges in Angola are blown to bits," he says, his voice rising slightly. "We need engineers to rebuild them."

The traditional missionary is no longer welcome in much of the under-developed world. But people who can combine word and deed are welcome. "You have to earn the right to preach," emphasizes Foster. "You have to live the message to earn credibility."

Angola is rich in natural resources. In recent years a significant oil reserve has been discovered. But it seems that the rich and the government will let little of it trickle down to the ordinary citizen.

Foster sees the church as the only alternative to get-rich-quick Angolans and those with harmful political agendas. Revitalization of both the Angolan and the North American church is crucial.

'Come, follow me'

Foster has finished more than three years of a four-year assignment as Canadian director of his mission board.

Financial support is, of course, a continuous need. Among Foster's valuable supporters are McMaster University Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital, both in Hamilton, Ont., which have at times helped him with supplies. They also provide him with opportunities to update his surgical skills whenever he is temporarily in Canada. He is a graduate of MUMC's first class in medical training (1972).

He is available (and greatly in demand) as a speaker. Listening to Stephen Foster can be uncomfortable and challenging, but is always inspirational. In his message one can hear Christ inviting the disciples at the seashore: "Come, follow me."

"...and preach thee, too, as love knows how, by saving word and faithful life!" (hymn, "Faith Of The Martyrs").

Walfried Goossen is a freelance writer and house-husband who lives in Dundas, Ont.

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Environment

Herbal remedy regulations needed

(NC) — There is a growing demand within the herbal-remedy industry for new standards in quality control. There are just too many products, with too little information, and too many loopholes in the system, for the consumer to feel confident with their purchases.

By May of 1998, the federal government's special advisory panel is slated to make specific recommendations on how the industry should be regulated. The Canadian-based, Planta Dei Pharma, was instrumental, along with other prominent manufacturers in the industry, in pressing for standards in "quality assurance."

As a result, DIN's (Drug Identification Numbers) are now issued by the Health Protection Branch, along with a statement of approved therapeutic indication on plant-based products. But most agree there's still a long way to go. Under existing laws, a commercial product that is ingested through the mouth is regulated as either a food or a drug. Manufacturers can choose to sell it as a food and thus, avoid the regulations governing drugs.

These products are prohibited then from making medicinal claims. Alternatively, registering brands which are believed to treat both minor and serious ailments can cost millions of dollars when it comes to providing scientific results. Therefore, some companies skip the approval process and as a result consumers are left with questionable quality, potency variations, and a label void of application information and possible side effects.

"Quality control is the central issue," says Planta Dei. "Until full regulations are implemented, consumers should compare labels and buy only those products that satisfy all questions, specifically information relating to ingredients, application, and dosage."

Parrots highly intelligent

CHICAGO (AP) — Calling someone a "bird brain" may not be as insulting as you think. New research suggests that parrots, like chimpanzees and dolphins, can master complex intellectual concepts that children cannot handle until age five.

Pet experts gathering in Chicago in early November for an American Veterinary Association forum believe the parrot's intelligence is why the bird has grown faster in popularity than any other pet over the past decade.

Irene Pepperberg, an ecologist and biologist at the University of Arizona who studies parrot intelligence, has focused on a bird she bought in 1977.

The parrot, Alex, can name 50 objects when shown them, knows colors and numbers up to eight and even understands the concepts of same and different.

"All of the tests we've done with dolphins and great apes to investigate their intelligence, we've done with Alex," says Pepperberg. "He scored as well as they did in many of them, better in some."

Liz Wilson, a parrot behavior consultant from Philadelphia, says she has heard of some cases in which people came home feeling blue and their parrots asked, "Is something wrong?"

A holiday to remember

John Wood

A clear sky and chill night air is nothing unusual here in Canada. But my most memorable night saw Canadian visitors high in the California Sierra Nevada. It was two decades ago now, when Cathy and I were camping on the snow at 8,000 feet on a cloudless December eve.

They came upon us silently, but not unwelcome, and almost Magi-like in the surreal light-darkness of the snow-covered landscape. We never saw them, but heard the distinctive call of a dozen or more Canada geese just above our heads.

They were winging low over the summit, travelling from Lake Tahoe to winter on grain in the Central Valley near Sacramento. I sometimes think of them when I pull some California produce from the shelf. We both like to "winter" on the fruitfulness of that great valley.

Fading memories

Have you ever noticed how this modern life we live has a way of disconnecting us from the land and the creatures? It almost takes an act of will to reconnect with the pulses of the natural world. I wonder sometimes just what that does to our reading of Scripture. The Bible is a book that was written and read by people who were always close to nature. The creation was present with them. Uncomfortably so at times, but in ways that are unlike what most of us experience.

I started reflecting on this recently when I noticed that my children were unfamiliar with the stories and events that were common place to my parents and me. The natural world my father knew in the first two decades of this century are gone forever. They are a vague memory for me, and lost completely to my children's generation.

So what goes missing when we change our relation to earth so dramatically? Well, for one thing, the force of the Christmas story is easily diminished. Oh, not the mystery of Christ's birth or the Incarnation. But there are other things that dim.

Scripture tells a finely crafted story. It weaves an integrated tale from first to last. I enjoy looking at the parts, but love most seeing the whole sweep of the gospel message — the grand story that encompasses all of creation: angels, humans, creatures, the earth. Each one has a distinctive voice; we need to tune our hearts to hear their part. Christ is in the world reconciling the whole creation to himself.

A contemporary Christmas carol

But I wonder if we can even read the Christmas story with any sense of what it meant to shepherds in the fields at night? I suspect that if a heavenly choir broke out in chorus we wouldn't notice! We can't hear when our ears are full of the cacophony of our economic activity.

Joy to the world, the dollar's up! And bonds are steady too. Newspapers repeat the sounding joy of interest rates and sales; and unemployment at the bottom of the scale. Let heaven and job creation ring. We shall be saved from inflation or deflation, but not infatuation with the latest money can buy.

If this all seems a bit over-blown, then I suggest that you step out to a hillside on a cold clear night. Take the Scriptures along and start at the Christmas story. If you read on long enough you may find you're starting to hear another message than the one so loud in our ears today.

I suggest that you take a friend or two along. This isn't a solitary exercise, but one we must undertake in community. For it is only together, as the body of Christ, that we will have the strength, the courage, the audacity, to stand out in this season of joy.

John R. Wood teaches environmental science at The King's University College in Edmonton.

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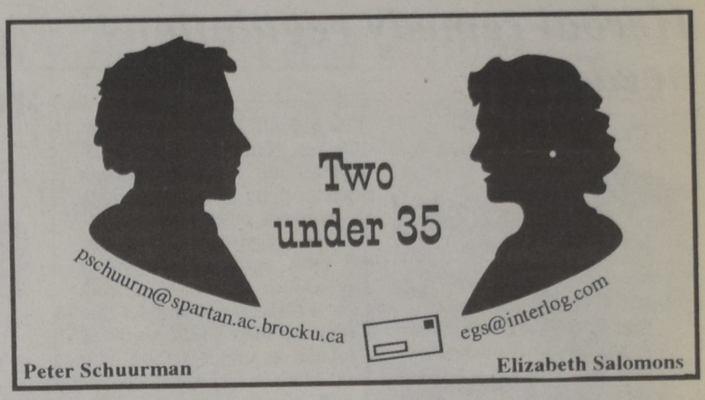
E-mail: impersonal, or reviving the art of letter writing?



Dear Elizabeth:

Our first year in electronic dialogue is coming to an end. If we just stopped writing the column now and decided never to meet, I wonder if I could say that I know you? We have never met or spoken with each other face to face. I wonder if it takes less time to forget a virtual friend?

I think electronic media, like many of the forces of mass production, alienate us from each other even as they bring us together. It's "Consumer Season," and millions of people are buying things made by some strange machine on the other side of the globe. Like e-mail, it brings the world together like never before, but it does it in an impersonal, forgettable way.

That's why I've liked writing this column with you the past year. My half of it is something that *I* have created. I spent time in my study, often at really odd hours, agonizing over what sort of "wisdom" I had to pass on to CC readers.

Remember how we doubted in the first issue whether we had anything to contribute to a newspaper? And indeed, there were a number of months there where I felt empty, like I'd said all I had to say under the rubric of "Two Under Thirty Five."

But, if nothing else, I created something, sent it to you, and together we made something new, something infinitely unique as it bears, for better or for worse, the stamp of our unique personalities, hopes and fears. And to be honest, I'd rather spend a Saturday morning wrestling with my words in my study than wrestling with the anxious mob in the mall.

"I don't have time to create things," I've heard so many people say. "I've got too much shopping to do." I wonder if by not creating anything — be it a meal, a gift, or a letter — we become strangers to the better part of ourselves.

"I don't have time to create things," I've heard so many people say. I wonder if by not creating anything — be it a meal, a gift, or a letter — we become strangers to the better part of ourselves.

We slowly start to forget the talents God gave us, along with the secret joys that come with their use. What a travesty for the world that thousands of individuals and families are detoured from expressing themselves through personal channels. We become not only strangers to our better selves, but strangers to each other. Everything is mediated, everything is media — "through an intervening agent or thing."

So I am delighted that we could create this column together, Elizabeth. And I think we should meet soon, to give a solid personal base to the use of this impersonal tool.

Peace on earth,
Peter

Dear Peter:

Do you and I know each other? We've certainly shared a lot through our letters, but I suspect that when we do meet, we will learn more about each other in one conversation than we have all year. You're my one and only "virtual" friend, and it's been interesting chatting with you.

But certainly "out of sight, out of mind" holds true in this case. Our relationship isn't anything like the ones I have with my friends whom I see every week or my family whom I think about every day. There are a lot of limitations to communicating only through a modem.

On the other hand, I certainly feel that being "wired" has its advantages for relationships already founded on talking and listening and playing and laughing and crying. Because my immediate family lives across several time zones (BC, Alberta, and Korea) and some of us work shifts, calling each other can be hit or miss.

E-mail has brought us back into more frequent contact with each other, even though some things will never change (as in I still hear way more from my sisters than I do my brothers). I also have close friends who've moved across oceans, but e-mail allows us to keep in touch in a way that snail mail doesn't. At first I thought it was the novelty, but I'm beginning to think it's the medium.

I found e-mail a bit weird at first. I mean, I was used to writing long letters to get full use of my stamp, but suddenly my correspondence changed to a paragraph here and there. If I'm e-mailing someone every couple of days, that's usually enough, not to mention that it fits my schedule better. (These letters you and I compose are the longest e-mails I write.)

I heard an older fellow say this past year that he's rediscovered the art of letter-writing thanks to e-mail. I think it's kinda funny, actually, that it takes new technology to bring us back to old-fashioned past-times.

The following is something I read off a list I subscribe to, which gives it all a bit of perspective:

"Imagine if the Internet and e-mail had been invented before the telephone. We'd think the phone was a miracle! 'Hey, guys, you don't have to plug anything in or click on anything or wait for things to scroll up — you just pick the thing up! And hey — it's AMAZING: you can actually TALK to the person!'"

You call this technology impersonal. Maybe so, in a way. I think it certainly is more creative, as you said, in that I spend more time thinking about what I'm going to say to you than I would if we were sharing a cup of coffee somewhere.

Sometimes I feel it's safer. There's a wall between us, a wall that protects each of us. I can write things to you that I won't say in a personal conversation with a friend because I know you won't interrupt me or say "That's crazy!" to my face.

On the other hand, so much of communication is the tone of one's voice and body language, and because that entire dimension is missing in e-mail, I find it's easy to offend people sometimes. The nuances of "just kidding!" don't quite make it across with a smiley.

But for all that, I still think any kind of communication between two people can never be impersonal. If it is, it's not the medium, it's what's being said.

I hope I've been personable enough through these letters for you to get a sense of who I am. I guess we'll find out soon, won't we?

Have a blessed Christmas, Peter,
Elizabeth

Elizabeth Salomons is a freelance editor who lives in Toronto and is a member of First CRC there. Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Church's chaplain at Brock University. He's a member of Jubilee CRC in St. Catharines.

Learning to 'love without fear'

Peter and Marja are IN

Dear P & M:

One of the things that saddens me about the Christian community is the way some people reject their adult children for living a lifestyle that is unacceptable to the church, not in harmony with the teachings of the Bible and (it must be said) that fails to satisfy their own hopes and aspirations for their children.

Are we called to be executioners of God's judgment by rejecting those whose lives do not always reflect a "closer walk with God" or are we perhaps just afraid of what the "neighbors" might say?

God has accepted us in grace in whatever state we are, so must we not do the same for those we love? After all, loving and accepting someone is not the same as condoning his or her lifestyle; but if we raised our children in the knowledge of God, they already know where we stand. Therefore, is it not our unconditional love that will ultimately convince or convict them?

Dear Loving Unconditionally,

Since you did not supply any specifics, your letter only opens a theoretical discussion about judgmentalism in the church. And in a theoretical way we find it quite easy to agree with you that uncondional love beats rejection or shunning any day. After all, Jesus gave us only one *new* commandment, and that was to love one another as he first loved us. That means loving and dying for sinners *before*, not *after* they acknowledge their sins and are saved.

Before we point a finger we should consider the following. First, the finger that points at someone else usually has the effect of driving the targeted person away. Typically, that person will go where acceptance is to be found. Unfortunately, some persons find more acceptance in bars than they do in churches.

Secondly, a pointed finger always leaves three fingers directed at the pointer. Jesus taught this truth in his own picturesque way with his parable about specks and logs in people's eyes. His point? Our own sins should restrain us from extending judgment.

Does this mean that anything goes, nothing is to be challenged and no one is to be confronted? Not at all. Jesus spoke against the broad road. Jesus challenged his audiences with the will of God. Jesus confronted the enemies of the Kingdom. But he brought salvation to the Samaritan woman, Zaccheus the tax collector, and the thief on the cross by extending his acceptance first — and then changing their lives.

Many of us remember a time when congregational prayers would not mention the imprisoned son, the pregnant teenager, the common-law couple, the AIDS patient. That was a dark and terrible day to which we hopefully have bid a relieved farewell. Who needs the love of Christ more than the person in jail, the unwed single mother, the couple afraid of a legal commitment, the person dying from AIDS? And how will people know to extend the love of Christ to them if no-one even mentions them in prayer.

In our own ministry we have found tremendous relief in lifting the lid on hidden hurts. Each time we did, two things happened. People discovered that they were not alone in their confusion and pain as others related similar stories. And people were freed to reach out in love to the family and persons concerned.

Specifically, we remember the first time Peter prayed in church for a son of one of our congregations who was serving a jail sentence. It broke the silence on his family's suffering and enabled church members to reach out to him and his parents with cards and visits.

As far as this column is concerned, we've consistently encouraged our readers to keep reaching out to friends and family members who find themselves outside the mainstream of the church due to circumstance or choice. Your point about differentiating between loving the person and condoning the lifestyle is one that we've made more times than we can count. We trust that this advice has helped to maintain bonds that otherwise might have been tragically broken.

Judgment is rooted in fear. Some fear that staying in touch *does* mean condoning, and that any show of acceptance will take us on a downward spiral away from the values and lifestyle that God wants and we hold dear. The Apostle John, however, counters this with the teaching that "perfect love casts out all fear." Indeed, we know that our care for the imprisoned young man, for example, did not lead other young people into a life of crime.

One last thought: Beware of judging those whom you deem to be judgmental. The pointed finger needs to become an open hand, extending God's love to those who are doing the judging as well as those being judged.

Write to: P & M, 16 Kimbermount Drive, St. Catharines, ON L2N 5V6.

Peter and Marja Slofstra are a pastor and wife team living in St. Catharines, Ont. They are assisted by an advisory panel consisting of Herman de Jong, Bill Lidkea, Alan Vandermaas, Marian Van Til and Bert Witvoet.

Mother Jones says liberals erred in ceding morality discussion to religious right

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (EP) — *Mother Jones*, a popular American politically oriented magazine of the left, seems to have discovered spirituality. The December issue is devoted to religion, beginning with a cover photo of teenagers at a Billy Graham crusade.

"When the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche declared in 1883 that God was dead, he miscalculated the staying power of religion," observes editor-in-chief Jeffrey Klein. "Since the turn of the century, the number of Christians across the globe has almost quadrupled."

The political left has made a tactical error in ceding public discussion about morality to the religious right, Klein suggests. "Because the doctrinaire hegemony for which the religious right is fighting assaults the most basic tenets of a pluralistic society, we cannot allow spirituality to be the exclusive preserve of the politically conservative," he notes.

Klein concludes, "Nietzsche could not conceive the extent to which religion could be a source of human empowerment. And Marx did not recognize that our desire to connect with a transcendent power runs even deeper than our drive for economic satisfaction. Each of us seeks. How we honor each other's search will tell the tale of the next millennium.

The issue contains a number of articles about spirituality, including an environmentalist's suggestion to limit Christmas spending to $100, a look at changing Bible translations, and an article about science and religious faith titled "Why Einstein Wasn't an Atheist."

Banned Christ painting returns to South Africa

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (EP) — A painting of Jesus Christ as a black man which was banned under apartheid was hung in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town Oct. 26, marking its return to South Africa from years in exile overseas.

The 1961 painting by Ronnie Harrison depicts 1960 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Chief Albert Luthuli as Christ, being crucified by Roman soldiers bearing the faces of apartheid architects former Prime Minister Hendrik F. Verwoerd, and his justice minister, John Vorster.

Cape Town's Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane noted, "We do well to remember that when the painting was first declared sacrilegious, many Christians throughout the world would have agreed...."

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For more specific information, please write or fax no later than **January 15, 1998**, to:

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Fundraising Report
Reformed Faith Witness

A Renfrew, Ont., subscriber recently sent a donation and wondered whether we would publish the fundraising results to date. We gladly oblige.

Reformed Faith Witness supports the mission of **Christian Courier**. Incorporated on August 1, 1996, RFW was approved for tax exempt status as a registered charity under the **Income Tax Act** retroactive to the date of the incorporation. As such, RFW is able to receive donations and issue tax receipts. The fundraising campaign started in 1996 and has been ongoing ever since.

Results	Total	
1996 Campaign	$ 8,721.50	48 donors
1997 Campaign (to Dec. 9, 1997)	$10,685.56	61 donors

We are now beginning to raise funds to enable us to hire a promotional person in 1998.

Because of the postal strike, Revenue Canada has extended the deadline for 1997 charitable giving from December 31, 1997, to **January 31, 1998**! We urge our readers to make a 1997 tax deductible donation on or before January 31 next. Please use the coupon published elsewhere in this issue.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the mandate of Reformed Faith Witness is invited to contact Stan de Jong, executive director, c/o Christian Courier, by letter, **phone (905) 682-8311 or fax (905) 682-8313.**

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Calendar of Events

Please submit only brief items. Placement is subject to space availability. Lengthy, multiple-event announcements will be rejected. We reserve the right to edit the material and to charge a nominal, per issue fee per item inserted.

Dec. 13-20 Christmas concert series by the Ont. Music Assembly (Leendert Kooij, director), with Andre Knevel at the organ. **Dec. 13:** Melrose United Church, **Hamilton**, Ont.; **Dec. 17:** Maranatha CRC, **Bowmanville**, Ont.; **Dec. 20:** Willowdale United Church, **Willowdale**, Ont. Info.: (905) 775-2230.

Dec. 14 Dutch worship service led by Rev. J. Groen, 3 p.m., CRC, **Ancaster**, Ont.

Jan. 25 Dutch worship service led by Rev. Ralph Koops, 3 p.m., CRC, **Ancaster**, Ont.

Feb. 4 Annual "Church & The Law" seminar, for ministers, church leaders and Christian charities, providing practical information on current legal issues. From 8 a.m.-3:45 p.m., Queensway Cathedral, 1536 The Queensway, **Toronto** (Etobicoke), Ont. Held in conjunction with the Canadian Council of Christian Charities. Main speakers: Carl Juneau (Revenue Canada) and Father Francis G. Morrisey (Ottawa's St. Paul's University). Info.: Phone (519) 669-5137, Fax (519) 669-3291.

Send your questions to Peter and Marja. Confidentiality is assured.

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News

Retired nurse seeks to sanitize language

Lee Hill-Nelson

WACO, Texas — "If you as a parent haven't taken in a 'family movie' recently and ended up wincing at least once, you haven't taken in a movie," said Audra Lewis in a soft voice as she leaned forward speaking to a Christian business person's luncheon. One by one her audience members laid down their forks and knives and focused their eyes on the speaker as she told about the Clean Language Campaign.

"I believe in freedom of speech," said Audra. "But, I also believe we show respect to others by the speech we use and respect to our Lord when we refuse to use His name as a slang word. I am more concerned about everyday language than I am about the language in movies and television."

"I've never liked profanity," said Audra. "For a long time, I'd think somebody ought to do something. And, then it came to me that *I* can do something."

Audra is a retired nurse. Three years ago when she'd come to work, she passed a "No Smoking" sign. An idea came to her that perhaps the same sign could be used to remind folks to not use profanity.

COURTESY LEE HILL-NELSON

Audra Lewis (right) wears her "Clean Language" T-shirt when she attends worship services at the "Church Under the Bridge" in Waco, Texas, where homeless people and others gather to worship.

Sign language

That night she told her Nurses for Christ group, an organization that promotes Christianity and better living, about her idea. They liked the idea and some volunteered to help with a Campaign for Clean Language.

Audra, together with an artist, designed a sign. The campaign took off.

Audra's first contact was the editor of the hometown newspaper who published a story about her campaign. Her second contact was the superintendent of schools. Today signs that say "Clean Language Spoken Here" are on the front doors of every school in Waco, Texas. One principal put bumper stickers denoting clean language inside all buses for his school. Some businesses in Waco have put the signs on their front doors and some people have put them inside their offices.

Audra is asked to speak at church meetings, business meetings, and is eager to speak to any group or individual about her campaign.

She volunteers in a women's jail ministry and at Mission Waco, an organization that ministers to the poor and homeless.

Clean T-shirt

"I wear my T-shirt and they ask questions. I tell them, 'Think about your language. This is a way you can improve your life right now and it will not cost you a red penny.'"

"One day I invited some inmates to take a good-natured vow that 'I am not going to curse anymore,'" said Audra. "When I visited the following Sunday, one young lady hugged me and said she now puts more thought into what she says. Another inmate wrote a poem saying she doesn't want to curse again." One small rehabilitative step? Or a giant bound?

Audra wears her T-shirt most every place she goes; she's even worn it to church. Always she hears comments such as, "We really need something like that" and "Where can I get a T-shirt?"

"I'm excited about this campaign," said Audra. "We especially want to give parents something to think about in raising their children. We want a generation to revere God's name.

"Bernhard Anderson in his book *Understanding the Old Testament* said: 'In ancient Israel, it was believed that the name was filled with power and vitality. At the human level, the name represented the innermost self or attitude of a person.' Remember God's commandment: 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain' (Exodus 20:7, NKJV)."

Audra's voice trembled and hurt shone in her eyes as she said that some Christians as well as non-Christians tend to use God's name as a slang word and believe it is all right.

When it was time for the business people in Audra's audience to return to their work places, some bought T-shirts, some bought bumper stickers. There were mumblings like: "I really needed to hear that"; "I'm going to put my bumper sticker on the back of my golf cart"; and "I'm going to put bumper stickers on the backs of my company's trucks. Some of those guys really talk bad."

For more information, write to "Clean Language," 5831 Caldwell, Waco, TX 76710 (Phone: 817-772-7744).

Copy of sign on the front door of all schools in Waco and on the doors of many businesses.

Thinkbit

Two apples up in a tree were looking down at the world. The first one said, "Look at all those people robbing, raping, fighting and killing each other. Some day we apples will be the only ones left and then we'll rule the world." To which the second apple answered, "Which of us — the reds or the greens?"

Dave Osborn, Coquitlam, B.C., sent this in to "Your morning smile" at the Globe and Mail, Oct. 7, 1997

News Digest

White Ribbon campaign goes worldwide

TORONTO — The White Ribbon campaign to fight violence against women, once a small voice regarded as a Toronto grassroots cause, has gone global. This year, ribbons are being showered across Russia, the U.S., New Zealand and Norway, the *Toronto Star* reports.

Toronto Councillor Jack Layton, who started the campaign in 1991, is very pleased. "It's a little like land mines. A couple of Canadians started it up and the world is joining in," says Layton. "Violence against women hasn't started to end yet, so I think we still have a long way to go."

Cowboy preacher corrals converts

SEDGEWICK, Alta. (CP) — Terry Leslie is a Christian cowboy who preaches at rodeos instead of churches. He presents short, country-and-western soaked sermons, reminding those assembled that there's more to life than carousing. "Whatever you sow is what you're going to reap in life," he says. "So don't go out Saturday night and sow your wild oats and go to church Sunday morning and pray for a crop failure."

Leslie, a 54-year-old Alberta rancher, is president of the Canadian chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Cowboys. For several years, he and a small group of gospel musicians have been attending 15 to 20 rodeos a year, talking and singing about salvation and hand out New Testaments.

Bolivian burgers

LA PAZ, Bolivia — McDonald's has opened its first restaurant in Bolivia, offering tea made from coca leaves — the main ingredient in cocaine — to wash down its Big Macs and fries. Hundreds of people stood in line in the capital city, La Paz, to dine at Bolivia's first international fast-food restaurant, reports the *Toronto Star*.

The menu makes another concession to local tastes, besides coca tea (which has no strong effects); it offers its version of the *saltena*, a dish of beef, potatoes, peas and hot peppers encased in pastry. It will be called the McSaltena.